The Problem of Dinah's Age

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Genesis 33:4 "Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, falling on his neck and kissing him; and they wept."

Jacob and Esau certainly said much more than is recorded in the Text. Jacob certainly asked for news of his parents, and it is more than likely that Rebekah was already dead. Sarah died at the age of 127, and Rebekah was at least 120 when Jacob fled, and he had been gone twenty years. This explains why Jacob was in no hurry to see his father. It is also possible that Jacob was bitter toward his father: if Isaac had recognized what God had told Rebekah, and the fact that Esau had sold the birthright, and had not tried to bless Esau anyway, Jacob would not have gone through the distress and humiliation that he did. In fact, it seems that Isaac was in his last ten years when Jacob finally showed up (**35:27-29**). The fact that Jacob was in no hurry to see his father explains what happened at Succoth.

Genesis 33:16 "So Esau returned that day to Seir by the same route. **17** And Jacob went to Succoth, and **built himself a house**, and made shelters for his cattle; therefore he called the name of that place Succoth."

The name means 'shelters'. We do not know how long Jacob stayed in Succoth, but if he built a house for himself and made shelters for his livestock, he certainly stayed there for some time; probably a few years. Just to build the house would have taken some time; he would have had to find the building materials, etc. They were accustomed to tents; it is very strange that he would have built a house. And why build shelters for the livestock, something that they had never had? In **31:3** Jehovah said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers, and to your family"; but since Succoth was on the east side of the Jordan, Jacob stopped before entering that land and going to his father. Jacob's attitude is indeed strange; he was in no hurry to obey God's command.

On second thought, Jacob must have stayed there for quite a number of years, because of the problem of Dinah's age. When they arrived in Succoth, Reuben, the firstborn, could have been no more than thirteen years old, having just turned thirteen, in the event. **30:21** says that Dinah was born "after" Zebulun, Leah's sixth son, so Dinah may not have been even five years old (remember that after Judah Leah stopped bearing for a while). To attract Shechem's attention, she would have had to be a well-developed teenager, probably at least fifteen years old. Also, Simeon and Levi would have been no more than twelve and eleven when they arrived in Succoth, but to massacre all the men of Shechem (**34:25**), they would have had to be men at full strength. They stayed in Succoth for at least ten years, but I would guess that it was between thirteen and fifteen. The time that Jacob's sons spent near Shechem before plundering the city was probably not very long.